the standard operating system is supplied from a memory at the central computer to the local computer. The standard installation of the operating system to a memory of the local computer is performed using the standard operating system on the storage medium and, in addition, this is customised using the model. The use of a modular definition of a model of a customised operating system installation facilitates the maintenance of the customised installation procedure.

In this example, the installation of a UNIX-based operating system (UNIX is a registered trademark in the United States and other countries, exclusively licensed through X/Open Company, Ltd.) is described in the context of a local area network. Also, the management system is implemented by means of software stored in the memory of the central management computer and is operative to control the processor of the management computer to implement the autoinstallation process.

However, although a particular embodiment of the invention has been described, it will be appreciated that many modifications and/or additions thereto may be made within the spirit and scope of the invention.

For example, although in the particularly described embodiment the management system is implemented by means of software which is stored in memory at a central management computer and is operative to control the management computer to carry out the autoinstallation process, it will be appreciated that at least some of the functions of the management system could be implemented by means of special purpose hardware.

Also, although the invention has been described in the context of a UNIX environment on a local area network, it will be appreciated that other embodiments could equally be implemented in the context of another operating system and/or another form of network.

What I claim is:

1. A computer-implemented method of installing an operating system at a local computer connected to a remote management computer, said method comprising:

(a) providing a standard operating system on a removable storage medium at said local computer;

(b) supplying, from a memory at said management computer and via a connection to said local computer, a modular definition of an operating system model, said model defining a customized configuration of said standard operating system;

(c) performing a standard installation of said operating system from the removable storage medium at said local computer to a memory of said local computer; and

(d) employing said model to perform customization of said operating system in the memory of the local computer.

2. A method according to claim **1**, wherein at least one model defines an operating system configuration for a client workstation.

3. A method according to claim **1**, comprising the additional step of providing, in said memory at said management computer, a hierarchical database for controlling said customization, wherein each said model is defined in terms of a set of modules, each module of said set being self-contained and defining an installation customization operation.

4. A method according to claim **3**, wherein said modules define respective post-processing operations following said standard installation.

5. A method according to claim **4**, wherein, for at least one model, said modules define respective post-processing operations selected from the following list:

installation of files for remote systems access;

setting of boot target addresses;

installation of patches;

restoration of archived data and/or software;

installation of unbundled software; and

securing of the operating system.

6. A method according to claim **3**, wherein said modules define respective pre-processing operations performed prior to said standard installation.

7. A method according to claim **6**, wherein, for at least one model, said modules define respective post-processing operations selected from the following list:

setting hardware characteristics; and

automatically archiving data and or software for subsequent restoration.

8. A method according to claim **3**, wherein said installation is responsive to hardware configuration data for said local computer in a rules file to identify an appropriate model file in said hierarchy for customization of said operating system.

9. A method according to claim **8**, wherein said model file defines the modules by means of links within said hierarchy.

10. A management system for controlling the installation of an operating system on a local computer, wherein:

said management system is stored at a management computer remote from said local computer;

said local computer is connected to said management computer via a network;

said management system comprises at least one modular definition of a model of a customized configuration of said standard operating system; and

said management system is arranged to be responsive to initiation of an installation of a standard operating system from a removable storage medium at said local computer to identify the model and to supply said model from a memory at said management computer via a connection to said local computer, the model being used to perform customization of said operating system at said local computer.

11. A management system according to claim **10** comprising a database including a plurality of files including:

a hierarchical data structure including a plurality of files including files defining a model of at least one operating system model for customizing an operating system at a local computer;

at least one rules file defining hardware characteristics of a possible local computer on which an operation system is to be configured;

said management system being arranged to identify parameters for identifying modules of a said model from said rules file.

12. A management computer comprising:

a memory;

a processor;

a communications interface;

wherein said communications interface enables said management computer to be connected to at least one local computer on which an operating system is to be installed, wherein said management computer is remotely located from said local computer and wherein said processor is responsive to a management system according to claim **10** stored in said memory for installing a customized operating system at said local computer.